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## Electronic page gains new meaning, // Books move from paper to screen in up-and-coming formats

Emily A. Vander Veer. *Austin American Statesman*. Austin: May 19, 1999. pg. E.5

Author(s): Emily A. Vander Veer

Publication title: *Austin American Statesman*. Austin: May 19, 1999. pg. E.5

Source Type: Newspaper

ProQuest document ID: 41711353

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Article URL: [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url\\_ver=Z39.88-2004&res\\_dat=xri:pqd&rft\\_val\\_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&genre=article&rft\\_dat=xri:pqd:did=000000041711353&svc\\_dat=xri:pqi:fmt=text&req\\_dat=xri:pqi:clntid=19649](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:pqd&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&genre=article&rft_dat=xri:pqd:did=000000041711353&svc_dat=xri:pqi:fmt=text&req_dat=xri:pqi:clntid=19649)

### Abstract (Article Summary)

Read any good e-books lately? If you haven't, you may soon in the very near future. More and more publishers are encoding books in digital format and storing them on the Internet. Just click a button and you can purchase, download, and read a growing number of titles, from Stephen King's "Bag of Bones" to the Bible. All you need is one of the new dedicated e-book devices, a handheld personal digital assistant (such as 3Com's PalmPilot III) or a personal computer. Dedicated e-books

Two e-books -- the Rocket eBook and SoftBook -- are available for purchase; others, including Everybook Inc.'s Everybook Dedicated Reader and Librius.com's Millennium Reader, are expected later this year.

To load books onto the Rocket eBook, a reader fits the device into a special docking cradle attached to a PC, then logs onto a Web site that sells Rocket titles. Currently, Barnes & Noble is the only online source for RocketBook titles, which NuvoMedia calls RocketEditions. The selection, while much smaller than a traditional bookstore, is growing rapidly. Says Martin Eberhard, NuvoMedia chief executive, "In the last five months, we have increased the available RocketEditions from 80 at launch to over 420 today."

### Full Text (924 words)

Copyright *Austin American Statesman* May 19, 1999

Read any good e-books lately? If you haven't, you may soon in the very near future. More and more publishers are encoding books in digital format and storing them on the Internet. Just click a button and you can purchase, download, and read a growing number of titles, from Stephen King's "Bag of Bones" to the Bible. All you need is one of the new dedicated e-book devices, a handheld personal digital assistant (such as 3Com's PalmPilot III) or a personal computer. Dedicated e-books

Dedicated e-book devices are to electronic publishing what the Walkman is to the music industry. Consumers buy the device (a small computer with a screen roughly the size of a real book), then buy specially formatted electronic files to view on the device.

Two e-books -- the Rocket eBook and SoftBook -- are available for purchase; others, including Everybook Inc.'s Everybook Dedicated Reader and Librius.com's Millennium Reader, are expected later this year.

\* Rocket eBook. NuvoMedia Inc.'s Rocket eBook is the size and shape of a thick paperback book. Its screen size is 4- 1/2" by 3", and it weighs in at just shy of a pound and a half.

To load books onto the Rocket eBook, a reader fits the device into a special docking cradle attached to a PC, then logs onto a Web site that sells Rocket titles. Currently, Barnes & Noble is the only online source for RocketBook titles, which NuvoMedia calls RocketEditions. The selection, while much smaller than a traditional bookstore, is growing rapidly. Says Martin Eberhard, NuvoMedia chief executive, "In the last five months, we have increased the available RocketEditions from 80 at launch to over 420 today."

A Rocket eBook costs \$500 and is currently only available by Web order (<http://levenger.com/Shop/Computing/>). According to the company, they will be available through retail channels this summer.

While the cost of each Rocket title varies, most are within 30% of the retail price of a "real" (paper) version.

\* SoftBook. With a 6" x 8" screen, SoftBook Press's SoftBook is about twice as big (and twice as heavy) as the Rocket eBook. The SoftBook's built-in model plugs directly into a phone jack; no PC intermediary is required.

SoftBook sells for \$600 (\$300 if the customer agrees to purchase \$20 worth of books per month for two years). The cost for each individual SoftBook is comparable to the cost for a RocketEdition, but there are currently far fewer SoftBook titles available. Hand-held personal digital assistants

More than 2 million people own hand-held personal digital assistants. Rather than wait for consumers to rush out and purchase dedicated e-book devices, specialty publishers Peanut Press and MemoWare are working with traditional publishers to format books for these tiny palm-size devices.

But while PDAs are certainly the most portable e-book option, that portability exacts a price. "The text display is simply too small to read without frustration," says Austin PDA user Jeff Kirk. "Add in the battery life memory constraints, and I don't see why anyone would want to read a book this way." Personal computers

Recognizing that more people use personal computers than dedicated e-book or handheld devices combined, a few electronic publishers use the widespread ASCII, HTML, and PDF formats to publish books for display on readers' personal computer screens. Many titles are available either free, or at a very low cost.

Among the most well-known of these publishers are Project Gutenberg, a volunteer organization that focuses on digitally encoding "public domain" books (books more than 50 years old that can be freely copied) and Hard Shell Word Factory and NetBooks.com, online publishers that offer electronic-only books (books that have never appeared in print) Pixels vs. parchment

With all the disadvantages of reading online -- eye strain and the purchase of an expensive electronic gadget paramount among them -- why bother?

\* Save space. Say good-bye to overstuffed backpacks and bookshelves: you can store dozens of e-books (or hundreds, or even thousands, depending on your hardware) in the same physical space.

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\* Save time. No waiting on line at the local bookstore to buy Oprah's latest recommendation -- or waiting for Amazon.com to deliver.

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\* Hear all about it. E-books can contain hypertext links, pictures, sound, and video clips -- dramatic improvements for how-to titles. (Imagine a history text that includes a sound clip of a Malcolm X speech, or a cookbook that shows the author demonstrating a complicated recipe.)

\* Stay current. Because the traditional publishing cycle runs anywhere from months to years, nonfiction books targeted toward volatile industries (computer software, medicine, tax accounting, and so on) are out of date almost as soon as they hit the shelves. E-books can be updated and distributed much more quickly.

But don't kiss the best-seller on your nightstand goodbye just yet.

"People have been saying that electronic publishing would be the death of our industry for years," says Peggy Hailey of Austin's BookPeople. "I suppose it's possible, but I don't foresee it.

"There will always be a place for books."

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## Opening up to books on screen Rocket eBook, SoftBook Reader may win you over: [FINAL Edition]

Edward C. Baig. USA TODAY. McLean, Va.: Dec 22, 1999. pg. 03.D

Subjects: Books, Handheld computers

Companies: NuvoMedia Inc (NAICS: 511210) , Softbook Press Inc (NAICS: 511210)

Product Names: NuvoMedia Rocket eBook, SoftBook Reader

Author(s): Edward C. Baig

Article types: Product Review-Comparative

Column Name: PERSONAL TECH

Section: LIFE

Publication title: USA TODAY. McLean, Va.: Dec 22, 1999. pg. 03.D

Source Type: Newspaper

ISSN/ISBN: 07347456

ProQuest document ID: 47420230

Text Word Count 1139

Article URL: [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url\\_ver=Z39.88-2004&res\\_dat=xri:pqd&rft\\_val\\_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&genre=article&rft\\_dat=xri:pqd:did=000000047420230&svc\\_dat=xri:pqi:fmt=text&req\\_dat=xri:pqi:clntid=19649](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:pqd&rft_val_fmt=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:journal&genre=article&rft_dat=xri:pqd:did=000000047420230&svc_dat=xri:pqi:fmt=text&req_dat=xri:pqi:clntid=19649)

### Abstract (Article Summary)

And yet, now that I've taken in Alice in Wonderland and Stephen King with a couple of these electronic tablets, I'm not ready to dismiss them out of hand. Sure, the devices -- the Rocket eBook from NuvoMedia and the SoftBook Reader from SoftBook Press -- have shortcomings. You can't print pages, neither is in color, and the number of titles is limited.

As it is, consumers can use software to read books via computer or through personal digital assistants (PDAs). Microsoft's Reader software for PCs and laptops begins shipping in 2000, and the company says customers will buy more than 1 million titles the first year. For now, how does the Rocket eBook compare with the SoftBook Reader? Here's a tale of two e-books:

\* Rocket eBook. Imagine a 22-ounce gizmo that resembles a paperback-size Palm PDA and you get a sense of what the Rocket eBook is like. As with Palm, you can use a stylus to tap on icons that bring up menus for handling tasks (setting bookmarks, underlining). You also can enter notes through a handwriting recognition program. You place the device in a docking cradle that hooks to the serial port on your PC. That's how you can move titles from the Web to the reader.

**Full Text** (1139 words)

Copyright USA Today Information Network Dec 22, 1999

e-world; Every day: Living with technology

I think I'll curl up with a good, um, digital reader.

No, it doesn't have the same ring to it, which is why I cast a skeptical eye over the hand-held readers known as electronic books. I already read more than I want on computer screens, so the prospect of spending extra hours gazing at a high-tech device didn't appeal to me, especially when there's nothing wrong with a good, old-fashioned paperback.

And yet, now that I've taken in Alice in Wonderland and Stephen King with a couple of these electronic tablets, I'm not ready to dismiss them out of hand. Sure, the devices -- the Rocket eBook from NuvoMedia and the SoftBook Reader from SoftBook Press -- have shortcomings. You can't print pages, neither is in color, and the number of titles is limited.

But digital tomes do show promise, and major publishers are busily digitizing new and old titles.

First and foremost, an eBook lets you download numerous volumes onto a device that weighs little more than a single hardcover book. You won't need Schwarzenegger muscles to travel with your Ludlums, War and Peace and the complete works of Shakespeare, plus newspapers, magazines and documents for work. Half the business travelers surveyed by Yankelovich Partners and eBook provider netLibrary said they are not interested in adding weight to their luggage. Who could blame them?

As it is, consumers can use software to read books via computer or through personal digital assistants (PDAs). Microsoft's Reader software for PCs and laptops begins shipping in 2000, and the company says customers will buy more than 1 million titles the first year. For now, how does the Rocket eBook compare with the SoftBook Reader? Here's a tale of two e-books:

\* Rocket eBook. Imagine a 22-ounce gizmo that resembles a paperback-size Palm PDA and you get a sense of what the Rocket eBook is like. As with Palm, you can use a stylus to tap on icons that bring up menus for handling tasks (setting bookmarks, underlining). You also can enter notes through a handwriting recognition program. You place the device in a docking cradle that hooks to the serial port on your PC. That's how you can move titles from the Web to the reader.

NuvoMedia's software contains a Web browser that takes you to the Rocket site, where you can buy e-books or download some free. Titles are stored in your virtual library until you transfer them to the device. It took me about 10 minutes to download all of Shakespeare. You also can purchase downloadable books at Barnesandnoble.com and Powells.com.

Among the latest best sellers available at the Rocket site are Personal Injuries by Scott Turow (\$27) and 'Tis: A Memoir by Frank McCourt (\$26). But Amazon.com was selling hardcover copies for half the e-book price, plus shipping.

The standard Rocket comes with 4 megabytes of flash memory, enough to hold about 4,000 pages, or roughly 10 books; an optional 32MB upgrade card provides 32,000 more pages. You can remove books to create space; no need to repurchase a title if you want to restore it. NuvoMedia says you'll get 20 to 40 hours on its rechargeable internal battery.

Reading on the 5.6-inch screen was easy enough, though I still didn't feel as comfortable as I would with an ordinary book, even with the ability to change font sizes and display text horizontally or vertically. A handy backlight lets you read in bed without disturbing your spouse.

You advance text or go backward by pressing arrow keys. But words scroll up and down rather than move naturally from page to page. I had trouble sensing where I was in terms of the entire work, even with the presence of a status indicator on the side and a bar telling me what page I was on.

Rocket does provide a couple of useful features. You can tap on a word to bring up a definition from a Random House Webster's dictionary. And you can download personal and corporate documents and Web pages.

\* SoftBook. This felt more like I was reading a regular hardcover volume -- you flip open a protective leather cover, and SoftBook comes to life. Through one simple switch, you turn complete pages in either direction. The bright, 9.5-inch backlit LCD can display a full page. Separate menu and bookshelf buttons are easy to navigate. If you press on the upper right corner of a book, a dogear marks the page.

But the more pleasurable experience comes at a trade-off. The 2.9-pound device is heavier than the Rocket and considerably larger. It also costs more. You can get the device for as little as \$300, but you must spend \$20 a month for more than two years of content. If you spring for \$600 upfront, there are no such obligations.

As with NuvoMedia's entry, you can search for particular passages, add notes and alter the text size. But you get only three to five hours on the rechargeable lithium ion battery. You can hold about 5,000 pages on 8MB of memory, upgradeable to about 100,000 pages with optional memory cards.

One advantage over the Rocket eBook is you won't need a PC or Net account. Instead, you connect a cord to a standard phone line, and the built-in 33.6-kbps modem kicks into action. It takes you to a site that houses books you have ordered or have access to, including 100 free classics (Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility, Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights, etc.). You also can download magazines or arrange to get your company's documents.

SoftBook says you can move about 100 pages per minute, but when I downloaded the Bill Gates book Business @ the Speed of Thought, I couldn't help but wonder if "thought" was any quicker than this: It took me 11 minutes to download the 470-page hardcover work.

I also grabbed a recent issue of Fortune. But stripped of pictures and graphics, the magazine's impact was lost.



Alas, during the downloading process I received a nasty message: "A server SIS error has occurred. The server appears to be not available." My paperbacks never gave me such trouble.

TEXT OF INFO BOX BEGINS HERE:

The bottom line

\* NuvoMedia Rocket eBook ( \* \* 1/2 out of four, \$199 to \$348, [www.nuvomedia.com](http://www.nuvomedia.com)) Pro: Small device can hold lots of books and incorporates a dictionary. Con: It's not as easy to use, and it didn't feel like a real book.

\* SoftBook Reader ( \* \* 1/2, \$300 to \$600, [www.softbook.com](http://www.softbook.com)) Pro: No need for a PC or Net account, and the large screen best simulates the reading experience. Con: It's bigger, heavier and more expensive.

E-mail [ebaig@usatoday.com](mailto:ebaig@usatoday.com)

**[Illustration]**

PHOTO, B/W, Peter Freed, USA TODAY; Caption: Advancing text: The SoftBook Reader, foreground, and NuvoMedia's Rocket eBook stack up fairly well.

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